

Smoke-Free Ordinance Makes Healthy Waves on Surfside Beach

Issue

Surfside Beach, home to approximately 4,800 permanent residents, is situated four miles south of Myrtle Beach and 85 miles north of Charleston, S.C. Located in Horry County, the heart of S.C. tobacco-growing country, the town annually attracts thousands of visitors, many of whom are used to smoke-free indoor workplace laws in their own communities.

During 2007, this community started focusing on the harmful effects of exposure to tobacco smoke when it began discussing a smoke-free workplace ordinance. Secondhand smoke causes at least 38,000 annual deaths in the United States and between 580 and 1,030 annual deaths in South Carolina. The Surgeon General, our nation's top public health official, warned that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke, which can cause lung cancer and heart disease.

Intervention

Key leaders in Surfside Beach articulated their community's readiness to change the smoking culture of this popular tourist town, and made creating a local smoke-free ordinance for the town a community priority. The South Carolina Department of Health And Environmental Control (DHEC) in partnership with the South Carolina Tobacco Collaborative, South Carolina African American Tobacco Control Network (SCAATN), BREATHE Tobacco Prevention Coalition and local citizens worked with town officials to develop an ordinance to protect Surfside Beach workers, residents and visitors from the health hazards of exposure to secondhand smoke.

The DHEC Region 6 Chronic Disease Manager, who is supported by the Preventative Health and Health Services Block Grant, performed an important role in assisting the key community leaders and partners in the policy development process. Activities included:

- Providing sample smoke-free ordinances from other cities to town council members;
- Providing visitor survey data from nearby Charleston to show the potential fiscal impact of smoke-free ordinances on businesses in a resort area;
- Presenting data from a California survey to show the impact of banning tobacco use on public beaches. Control of cigarette butts and other litter issues were identified;
- Utilizing fact sheets, presentations and other resources to educate community residents and city officials in the planning process; and
- Identifying key decision makers, residents and local agencies to lead the advocacy process.

Impact

As of October 1, 2007 when the town implemented its ordinance, Surfside Beach was the first smoke-free community on the Grand Strand, the first smoke-free beach in the state and the first community in the heart of South Carolina's tobacco country to protect citizens and visitors against the dangers of secondhand smoke.

Along with reduced exposure to secondhand smoke for the town's 4,800 residents and thousands of annual visitors, other expected impacts of this policy change intervention will:

- Save on cleaning and maintenance cost (building and grounds);
- Prevent potential fires within businesses;
- Control beach litter from cigarette products (packages, butts, lighters, etc.);
- Reduce insurance cost for employees;
- Reduce absenteeism from workers due to tobacco related diseases;
- Eliminate time loss for smoking breaks.

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